

69 Singular and plural nouns

Nouns in English do not have a gender. They change form depending on whether they are singular, meaning there is one, or plural, meaning there is more than one.

See also:

Adjectives **92** Articles **63**

Irregular plurals **R24**

69.1 COMMON NOUNS

Common nouns often come after articles.
Adjectives describe nouns.



car



banana



skirt



game



idea



thought

69.2 PROPER NOUNS

Nouns that refer to specific names of people, places, days, and months are called proper nouns, and begin with a capital letter.



Egypt is a beautiful country.

Egypt is a country, so it begins with a capital letter.

"Country" is a common noun.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

I study at **Southern University**.



I can see **Mars** in the sky tonight.



The **Titanic** sank when it hit an iceberg.



My best friend is called **Jasmine**.



I was born in **Canada**.



I hope to someday win an **Oscar**.



69.3 SPELLING RULES FOR PLURALS

To make most nouns plural, "-s" is added to the singular noun.



book



books



toy



toys



IRREGULAR PLURALS

For nouns ending in "-s," "-x," "-z," "-ch," and "-sh," "-es" is added.

watch



watches

brush



brushes

box



boxes

bus



buses

quiz



quizzes

When a word ends in a singular "-z," the "z" is doubled and "-es" added.

"Man" and "woman," and words made from them, such as in job names, have irregular plural forms.

man



men

woman



women

businessman



businessmen

businesswoman



businesswomen

For nouns ending in a consonant followed by a "-y," the "-y" is dropped and "-ies" is added.

dictionary



dictionaries

story



stories

Some other nouns have completely irregular plurals. A good dictionary can be used to check these.

child



children

person



people

For nouns ending in "-o," the plural is usually formed by adding "-es." If the noun ends in vowel plus "-o," the plural is formed by adding "-s."

echo



echoes

radio



radios

Some nouns do not change in the plural.

species



species

sheep



sheep

70 Countable and uncountable nouns

In English, nouns can be countable or uncountable. Countable nouns can be individually counted. Objects that aren't counted are uncountable.

See also:

Forming questions **34** Articles **63**
Numbers **74** Quantity **75**

70.1 COUNTABLE AND UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

"A," "an," or numbers are used to talk about countable nouns.
"Some" can be used for both countable and uncountable nouns.

COUNTABLE NOUNS

There is **an** egg. 

There are **four** eggs. 

There are **some** eggs. 

UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

Uncountable nouns are always used with verbs in the singular.

There is **some** rice. 

"Some" is always used with uncountable nouns, not "a," "an," or a number.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

 **a** sandwich


 **an** apple

 **some** bananas

 **two** burgers

 **some** milk

 **some** water

 **some** spaghetti

 **some** sugar


70.2 MAKING UNCOUNTABLE THINGS COUNTABLE

Uncountable nouns can become countable when the noun is in a container.

 **some** sugar



a bag of sugar

 **some** water



three bottles of water

 **some** cereal



a bowl of cereal

70.3 NEGATIVES

For both countable and uncountable nouns, "any" is used in negative sentences and questions.

COUNTABLE NOUNS

There are **some** eggs.

There aren't **any** eggs.

↖ The verb is plural.

Are there **any** eggs?

↖ The verb is plural.

UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

There is **some** rice.

There isn't **any** rice.


↖ The verb is singular.

Is there **any** rice?

↖ The verb is singular.

70.4 QUESTIONS ABOUT QUANTITIES

"Many" is used to ask questions about quantities of countable nouns, and "much" to ask questions about quantities of uncountable nouns.


How **many** eggs are there? 


↖ The verb is plural.


How **much** rice is there? 


↖ The verb is singular.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

How **many** cupcakes are there? 

How **many** apples are there? 

How **much** cheese is there? 

How **much** chocolate is there? 

⚠ COMMON MISTAKES "MUCH" AND "MANY"

"Much" can only be used with uncountable nouns and the verb must always be singular.

How **much** pasta is there? 

How **many** pasta are there? 

71 Subject-verb agreement

One of the basic principles of English is that subjects and verbs must agree in number. Some subjects, however, can act like singular or plural nouns depending on the context.

See also:

Present simple 1

Singular and plural nouns 69

71.1 PLURAL NOUNS WITH SINGULAR AGREEMENT

Books and other works of art that end in a plural noun are used as singular for agreement.

Even though "tales" is plural, *The Canterbury Tales* is a single work of literature.

***The Canterbury Tales* was**
first published in the 1400s.



Other nouns look like they are plural because they end in an "-s," but have singular agreement. These include many place names and academic subjects.

Mathematics is becoming
a more popular subject.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



***Little Women* is** a novel by
Louisa May Alcott.



The Netherlands is famous
for its tulip industry.



Gymnastics was the most
enjoyable sport at school.



Politics is often a topic for
academic debate.



Athletics was an important part
of the ancient Olympic Games.

71.2 COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Collective nouns have a singular form, but refer to a number of people or objects as a group. In US English they generally take a singular verb. In UK English they can often be used with either singular or plural verbs.



If the subject describes a singular body, then the verb form must be singular.

The **team** **is** getting a new manager next year.

[The team as a whole is getting a new manager.]

Subject describes a collection of individuals.

UK only.

The **team** **are** feeling excited about the news.

[Each individual member of the team is feeling excited.]

FURTHER EXAMPLES

The **society** **is** going to have a meeting next week.



The **society** **are** discussing how often they should meet.

The **band** **has** just released its new album.



The **band** **have** been on tour to promote their new album.

The **government** **is** located in the capital city.



The **government** **are** in talks with the US.

My **family** **is** bigger than most other families I know.



My **family** **are** going away together for the first time in years.

The **company** **has** hired some new staff.



The **company** **have** been busy baking for a charity cake sale.

72 Abstract and concrete nouns

Most abstract nouns are uncountable. Some, however, can be either countable or uncountable, and the two forms often mean slightly different things.

See also:

Singular and plural nouns **69**

Countable and uncountable nouns **70**

72.1 ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE NOUNS

Abstract nouns refer to ideas, events, concepts, feelings, and qualities that do not have a physical form. Concrete nouns are things that can be seen, touched, heard, or smelled.

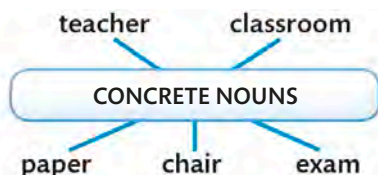


He has a lot of **books**, but not much **knowledge**.

"Books" is a countable, concrete noun.

"Knowledge" is an uncountable, abstract noun.

FURTHER EXAMPLES



FURTHER EXAMPLES



I can't wait to prepare for this **dinner party**.



I'm going to get my **car** fixed sometime soon.



I'm having **difficulty** logging on to my computer.



I need to come up with better **ideas** to keep my boss happy.

72.2 COUNTABLE AND UNCOUNTABLE ABSTRACT NOUNS

Some abstract nouns have both countable and uncountable forms. The forms have a slight difference in meaning, with the countable form being specific and the uncountable form being more general.

COUNTABLE

I've been there a few **times**.

Each "time" is a specific occasion.



He has had many **successes**.

"Successes" are the specific achievements.



It has some great **qualities**.

"Qualities" refers to specific features.



We learned several new **skills**.

These are the particular abilities learned.



I've had some **thoughts** about it.

These are several specific thoughts.



This city has a great mix of **cultures**.

This refers to several different cultures.



There's a range of **abilities** in class.

"Abilities" refers to a variety of different skill levels.



UNCOUNTABLE

There's plenty of **time** left.

"Time" refers to the concept in general.

Hard work leads to **success**.

"Success" refers to achievement in general.

It has a reputation for **quality**.

"Quality" refers to a high standard.

It takes **skill** to do that job.

"Skill" is the general ability to do something.

The task requires **thought**.

"Thought" refers to the process of thinking.

The museum is filled with **culture**.

"Culture" refers to items of art and history.

She has great **ability** in writing.

"Ability" refers to general skill.

73 Compound nouns

Compound nouns are two or more nouns that act as a single unit. The first noun(s) modifies the last, in a similar way to an adjective.

See also:

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Adjectives 92

73.1 COMPOUND NOUNS

Two nouns can go together to talk about one thing.

Table tennis is a form of tennis played on a table.

On Tuesdays I play **table tennis**.



The first noun is usually singular, even if the meaning is plural.

A picture book is a book of pictures, but "picture" stays singular.

My baby sister loves her **picture book**.



Sometimes, the first noun is plural.

My brother always plays on his **games console**.

"Games" is plural.



Some compound nouns are written as two separate words, some as one word, and some with a hyphen between the two. There are no clear rules for this, but good dictionaries can be used to check.



toothbrush



bus stop



six-pack

Hyphen

FURTHER EXAMPLES



The meeting is in the **town hall**.



I buy tickets at the **ticket office**.



I eat dinner at the **kitchen table**.



We were in a **cycle race**.



I'm having my 44th **birthday party**.



I've always wanted a **sailboat**.

73.2 LONGER COMPOUND NOUNS

Two or more nouns can be put with another noun to modify it. This structure is common in newspaper headlines in order to save space.

I came first in the **table tennis tournament**.



Bank robbery ringleader capture confirmed.



This means "the capture of the ringleader of the bank robbery" has been confirmed.

73.3 PLURAL COMPOUND NOUNS

To make a compound noun plural, the final noun becomes plural.

The **summer party** was fun.



Summer parties are always fun.

"Party" becomes "parties."

FURTHER EXAMPLES



Restaurant chains are reliable when you need a quick meal.



I have a collection of **teapots**.



I organize my **bookcases** when they start to look messy.



I spend a lot of time waiting at **bus stops**.